





THE SANCTITY OF CONSECRATED PLACES.

A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE CONSECRATION OF THE CHURCH OF
SAINT MARK, HORSHAM,

ON THE THURSDAY IN WHITSUN WEEK, 1841,

BY

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ARCHDEACON OF CHICHESTER.

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TO
THE REV. HENRY WINCKWORTH SIMPSON,
THE REV. JOHN FISHER HODGSON,
THE REV. JOHN KENRICK,
THOMAS COPPARD ESQUIRE,
THE CHURCHWARDENS,
AND ALL OTHERS BY WHOM THE BUILDING OF
SAINT MARK'S CHURCH, AT HORSHAM,
WAS BEGUN AND ENDED,

This Sermon,

IS INSCRIBED BY THEIR BROTHER AND SERVANT,

H. E. M.

I cannot willingly forfeit the opportunity, thus incidentally afforded me, of pointing out a plain duty, which results from a belief in the reality of God's presence in consecrated places, the duty I mean of maintaining our Churches, and all the furniture belonging to God's service with a religious and reverential care. It is, indeed, impossible to make consecrated places worthy of Him who dwells in them: but we shall not therefore be held guiltless if we convert holy places through our irreligious and penurious neglect into open provocations of the Divine Majesty. They demand of us a reverential treatment for His sake Who accepts them as His own. If we suffer them to fall into a slovenly decay, the slight passes on to Him. And let us beware of a hollow commendation of the so called *simplicity* which becomes His service, forasmuch as we well know that what in Churches men call simplicity, in their own dwelling places they would reject as a sordid slovenliness.

SERMON.

ST. JOHN. xiv. 16, 17. *“I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever: Even the Spirit of Truth whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: But ye know Him for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”*

This promise of our Lord was fulfilled in the coming of the Holy Ghost. When the Son of God withdrew from his Church on earth the manifestation of his visible person, the Spirit of God came in His stead to fill all things with His unseen presence. And this is the mystery of the faith which the Catholic Church, has ever celebrated at the season of this high Festival. And you have now invoked His divine presence to dwell in and consecrate to Himself this material shrine which you have builded. We shall do well then to consider awhile how this promise of our Lord bears upon our work to-day.

In these words are revealed two great truths which the wisdom of man had never reached.

First, we learn that the unseen Spirit of God is not an impersonal power, or emanation or influence, but a personal being—not, as it were a radiance

streaming from the Godhead, but an eternal light kindled at the same fount of everlasting Being: personal—as being Himself partaker of absolute and perfect Godhead; but undivided as eternally united in one nature with the Father and the Son.

And in the next place we learn, that this invisible Spirit who fills all things, and works through all things is not a mere combination of properties, and laws, working without conscious choice, and moral design, but a Being invested with all the Divine perfections, with all the attributes of God, and with peculiar offices of mercy undertaken in compassion to mankind. He is the Comforter, the Worker of miracles, the Dispenser of spiritual gifts, the Spirit of Truth, the Teacher of the Church, the Prophet of things to come, the Helper of our infirmities, the Sanctifier of the people of God. He is therefore a moral Being, unknown to the world judging by sense and sight, but known to the Church of God by the inscrutable revelation of Himself.

Such is the personality, and the character of the Holy Ghost: such is the mystery which we have already professed in the Creeds of the Catholic Church. “I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the Prophets.”

Now from this coming and abode of the Holy Ghost on earth, there are certain great principles of truth following by necessary inference. It follows, for instance,

1. That there is an Agent working in the world,

higher than the powers of nature—that is, a power supernatural. Of course this will be admitted in some sense by all who do not deny the being of a God. They must profess to believe that the maker of all things sustains and governs them by his continual presence and power. The most incredulous deists of old were forced to imagine a divine presence, which, to the material world, was as the soul to the body. But this after all is no more than what we call the powers of nature. It will account for the phenomena of the visible world, and is in accordance and identified with its course and changes. But the mystery of the Holy Ghost is something more than this—something which began to be from the Day of Pentecost, whereas the powers of nature were from the beginning of the world. Although the Holy Spirit wrought of old partially and in individuals, yet the returning presence of the Holy Ghost was a new principle added to the old frame of the fallen world. A new order was established in the earth, and a new dispensation opened. The nature of man was thenceforward regenerated. He was no more only a twofold mystery of body and soul, but a threefold mystery of body, soul, and spirit. There were facts for which no powers of nature could account; prophecy of things to come, healing of incurable sickness, raising of the dead, facts out of the line of nature's movements, and often contrary to her known procedure. But these were only the lesser miracles. There was yet one more, of all the greatest, though the least observed because we daily see it, the holiness of man: a fact more adverse to

the condition of mankind, more highly transcending the powers of nature, than life from the dead. The change in man from spiritual evil to spiritual good—from alienation to the love of God, is a great spiritual phenomenon, to be accounted for by no powers of nature, bespeaking a Divine Agent in presence and energy. No scheme of materialism, no theory of morals, no stunted form of Christian doctrine, can account even philosophically for this great spiritual fact, this re-ascending of the stream upward towards its forsaken source, contrary to all known laws, which no man need shrink from calling a perpetual miracle, forasmuch as it is an effect above the causes of nature wrought by a supernatural Being.

2. It follows also by a natural consequence that the abode and shrine in which this Divine Spirit dwells is the Church of God. The promise of our Lord to the body of his Apostles is a direct and sufficient proof, and the analogy of nature bespeaks the same conclusion. As the Almighty power which administers the natural world and sustains the series of natural causes presides with an especial presence over the natural works of God; so the Holy Ghost, the personal and moral being, who in the stead of the Son of God has come into the world abides in the moral nature of man: knitting mankind in one body which is the one Holy Church; One as united in a personal oneness, and Holy as dwelt in and sanctified by the Holy Ghost; according to the promise, “I will dwell in them and walk in them:”¹ and as our Lord said, “He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you:”² and St. Paul, “Know

1 2 Corinthians vi. 16.

2 St. John xiv. 17.

ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you":¹ and that "the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are."²

And for this reason in the Creeds of the Church, immediately after professing our faith in the Holy Ghost, we add, "and in the Holy Catholic Church," which is the dwelling place and shrine, the visible manifestation of the Divine invisible spirit. Good were it if men would consider well this mystery: for then the Church would neither be an object of the scorn and hostility of open foes, nor remembering the act and the end of Uzzah the subject of an irreverent patronage at the hands of professing friends. It is absolutely impossible for any christian man who truly believes in the personality, the coming and the presence of the Holy Ghost, to believe the Church of God to be no more than an institution of human origin, framed by political wisdom, or congregated by the mere voluntary adhesion of individual wills. I do not say these opinions may not be found lying side by side in the same minds, but they are so intrinsically repugnant, that no clear or consistent mind can long hold them in combination. Either our view of the Church must rise, as it is held forth in the creed, into an object of faith, and a part of the Divine economy of our redemption, or, if we are logical and consecutive our belief in the personality, moral character, and presence of the Holy Ghost, will sink into a vague, inexact and lifeless theory.

3. And once more, from the same truth it follows, that the means by which men are united to and con-

1 1 Corinthians vi. 19.

2 1 Corinthians, iii. 17

tinued in the unity of that one body,—and are thereby made partakers of the power and the presence of that one Spirit,—are the Holy Sacraments. As the Church is the outward and visible sign of the inward spiritual presence of the Holy Ghost, the one great all comprehending Sacrament as it were of our salvation through the blood shedding of Christ, so Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord are—the one the visible sign of our admission, the other of our continuance in the inward and spiritual grace of which the Church is the consecrated shrine :—our first admission being a new and spiritual birth, our continual sustentation being by the virtue of an heavenly and spiritual food. And here again, as in the last instance, the belief of men as to the nature of the Holy Sacraments will be exactly as their belief is in the personality and presence of the mysterious Spirit by whom the powers of holiness and immortality are infused into the Church of Christ. They that believe faithfully the mystery which the Church teaches us at the season of this Festival will believe assuredly that the Holy Sacraments are spiritual realities, verily and indeed given and received. And they that regard the Sacraments as mere signs, rites, or symbols, instructive indeed, and significant, but without peculiar and mysterious powers, have need to examine well their faith in the personality of the Holy Ghost, and therefore in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Perhaps many will find that unawares they have been resting on unsound foundations, and that low views of the Holy Sacraments are only indications of a low view of the highest doctrines. For among all parts of Christian

truth there are such intimate relations that an error admitted anywhere will be found reproduced and running through the whole system. And for this reason the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, (of which the Festival of this season commemorates a part) and the creed which contains that doctrine, is called the foundation of the faith ; because all other truths rest upon it and rise out of it.

4. It follows also that as the visible Church and the visible Sacraments are holy things, because of their relation to that Holy Spirit, so all things which are brought into a like relation have a *relative holiness*, derived from the same invisible Being. Such is the holy Ministry, or the body of men chosen out, and consecrated to the service of God, by holy orders. Such also are the visible structures, or churches, which are separated from all common and profane uses, 'dedicated to the glory of God, and consecrated by solemn prayer and benediction. Such also are the Furniture and the Vessels, the Holy Table or Altar, the Font or Baptistery, and all things pertaining to the due celebration of the Word of God and Sacraments, to the worship of God, and the manifestation of His invisible presence. Albeit they are lifeless, earthly, perishing, so are our mortal bodies ; yet are we temples of the Holy Ghost,—so are the water, bread and wine of the Holy Sacraments, yet are they “the outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace, given unto us, ordained by Christ himself.” In like manner is every such consecrated place as this, and all belonging to it, as, of old, the Tabernacle, and the Holy Place, and the Mercy Seat.

a symbol and visible witness of the unseen presence of God ; and from this day forward on all the furniture of this Sanctuary there is "Holiness to the Lord." In all our gatherings in his visible Church we have pledged to us His Ghostly Presence. "Where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." In our Fasts and Festivals, in our public acts of homage and devotion, in the Holy Sacraments, in the Holy rites which knit together and sanctify the states and stages of life, in and through all these worketh that great and awful Spirit ; so that these perishable walls become instinct with an heavenly life. They are as the many porches of the healing pool ; ever standing wide for the halt and maimed ; ever full of a supernatural virtue. In this place is the hem of His garment proffered to the hand of faith, and the words "I will, be thou clean." "Be opened." "Receive thy sight." "Thy faith hath saved thee." "Go and sin no more," are heard by faithful ears. Such are consecrated places. Surely then "How dreadful is this place." Surely "God is in this place" ; though we know it not. Surely, "this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

Seeing then that such is the truth in this article of our belief, consider what are the consequences which flow from it, and bear upon our probation and our practice.

As baptized men we have been made partakers of this visible Church, and in it of this invisible Spirit. His presence and His power have been about us, and within us, from the font of our regeneration unto this

day. You have been made temples of the Holy Ghost, and therefore you have been brought into an awful relation to this divine Being, who now fills the place of Christ our Lord in His earthly Church. Our baptism has brought us into a relation not less high and unearthly than they stood in, who companied with our Lord in his visible presence. He was not nigher to them than his unseen Spirit is to us. And as he through his short ministry on earth searched and tried their hearts with his intuitive sight of every rising thought, so does the Holy Ghost from the earliest dawning of our moral nature to the close of our earthly life, penetrate our inmost being, and discern the leanings and intents of our most secret will.

Our salvation then depends on this, whether or no we will faithfully abide in fellowship with the divine presence of the Holy Spirit of God. He, of his free and sovereign grace, adopted us into it while as yet we were sinners and estranged from Him. We were by nature children of wrath, and He hath made us children of grace. Our first admittance into that supernatural relation was His free gift, but our continuance in it must depend upon our own moral character.

First, therefore, we have need to subdue in ourselves all moral dispositions at variance with His divine character. We are warned by the Apostle Paul to beware how we resist the Spirit; nay, he bids us "Grieve not the Spirit." "Quench not the Spirit." They that sin he tells us, "do despite unto the Spirit of grace." We are not dealing with a mere power but a divine person. Moral evil, whether in open sin or

secret vice, is a direct antagonist of the Holy Ghost ; it kindles the whole nature of man into an energetic antipathy and warfare against Him. Wilful acts, deliberate resolutions, conscious intentions, wishes consented in, cherished imaginations, nay even transient thoughts, not rejected and repented of, are challenges, and provocations of His awful purity. And not these only, but anger and settled ill-will, and flashes of temper, and bickering and alienated affections, grieve the Spirit of eternal peace. And so also the irreverent speculative presumption of self-confident intellects, and the shallow cavillings of disputatious minds, and conscious resistance of undeniable evidence, and a fastidious refusal to inquire into unpalatable doctrines, are grave insults against the Spirit of heavenly truth. And, besides these sins of a more positive character, there is an easy slothful acquiescence in what is true, which is morally equivalent to a denial, and an unconcerned temper which cannot be roused, and a lukewarmness which enervates the whole character of a man's religion, and these too are sore and standing provocations of Him whose coming, and whose power, were foretold in the promise "He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." And yet, my brethren, is it not very certain that some of these moral features in various measures and combinations, will be found in almost all baptised men ? In them that are forgetful of the relation in which their baptism placed them to this unseen Being at all times, and in the best of men at some time, one or more of these provocations will be detected.

Surely, if men did but know in this life, as one day they shall know, how sorely they tempt and grieve the Holy Spirit by which they are sealed unto the day of redemption ; how they well nigh wear out His inexhaustible long-sufferings, and by their ingratitude and vain self-flatteries challenge Him to break through in anger the relation which he formed in mercy, they would stand in awe and sin not, fearing to awaken His jealous holiness by their wilful or heedless offences.

And, secondly, the surest way to free ourselves from these antagonist moral faults, is to bend all our care to the formation of such a character, as shall be in accordance and sympathy with His holy presence. It is a poor aim only to escape from positive evil ; and it is as dangerous, as it is unworthy of a Christian. What is it but the intermediate condition of the man dispossessed of the unclean spirit, but void of the Spirit of God , his heart empty and open—swept and garnished, inviting the return of the same faults with an accumulated power. So we often find the beginning of repentance baffled and defeated. Conscience and fear, and the goad of some visitation has prevailed it may be, to the first breaking off of evil habits ; but sloth and shallowness, and the lethargy peculiar to minds deadened by familiarity with evil, so keep a man back, that he neither wins nor reaches after any higher forms of spiritual life.

We have need then to strive watchfully with ourselves, that by the full assent of our will, and the deliberate choice of our hearts, we may be such as that Holy Spirit came down from Heaven to make us.

He came that he might restore our earthly being to an heavenly nature; that of sinful he might make us holy; that for eternal death, he might invest us with immortality. Ask of him the gifts of forgiveness, and repentance; of peace and of a clean heart. Pray him to chasten your spirits into obedience to His own: to sustain in you at all times a living consciousness that he dwelleth with you, and is in you. Carry this temper with you in the stillness of your solitary thoughts, and in the full action and throng of life: in seasons of temptation it shall be your shield; in the balancing of doubt it shall decide the turn for God; in sorrow it shall be your consolation; in prosperity it shall be your safety; "when thou goest it shall lead thee, when thou sleepest it shall keep thee, when thou awakest it shall talk with thee."¹

Brethren it is good for us to be here; for here it is that we learn to be familiar with His holy presence. It is well that you have planned and raised this consecrated shrine; and invited Him to dwell in it. Doubt not that He has heard your prayer, He is here; and except we grieve His Holy Spirit and tempt Him to depart from us, He will abide with us for ever.

In doing this work of homage to His name, you have also wrought a work of love to your poorer Brethren; and it shall not be forgotten where the box of ointment is remembered: your smallest offerings shall not be passed by where all labours of love are recorded. You have given to us also an opportunity of testifying with how keen a sympathy all the members of Christ's mystical body are united. We too are permitted this

day to make our oblations with yours, as thank-offerings for the spiritual blessings we have freely inherited. We accept this opportunity with gladness, remembering all the blessings we have enjoyed from the day of our baptism—the worship of God’s House, the knowledge of his pure Word, the holy Eucharist, and all sanctities which issue from our Parish Churches, and bear upon all the seasons of our life. Let us then join our oblations to the gifts of our brethren, that in this place the same inheritance may be secured to their children’s children.

Consecrate somewhat and you shall make it eternal : offer it, and you shall have it for ever : keep it, and it is yours no longer : “ whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.”¹ Let us offer ourselves, in body, soul and spirit, with a pledge taken from our substance, to “ the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto,” and yet henceforward dwelling also in this consecrated place, “ whom no man hath seen nor can see, to whom be honour and power everlasting, Amen.”²

1 St. Mark viii. 35.

2 1. Tim. vi. 15, 16.

